La Biennale di Venezia

61. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

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Klara Kristalova, Benjamin Orlow and Tori Wrånes present *How Many Angels Can Dance on the Head of a Pin?* at the Nordic Countries Pavilion 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia

Myth, matter and bodies blur in a world shaped by collapse and renewal



How Many Angels Can Dance on the Head of a Pin? is a collaborative exhibition presented by the Nordic Countries Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia. Bringing together works by **Klara Kristalova**, **Benjamin Orlow** and **Tori Wrånes**, and curated by **Anna Mustonen** (Chief Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma), the exhibition transforms the Pavilion into a sculptural, mythical environment where bodies, materials and architecture interact in shifting and unstable ways. The exhibition is

commissioned by Kiasma and co-commissioned by Moderna Museet, Sweden, and OCA – Office for Contemporary Art Norway.

The exhibition's title draws on a medieval philosophical question concerning how multiple entities may occupy the same space. Here, it opens onto broader reflections on coexistence - between bodies, systems and perspectives - at a time marked by increasing social, environmental and geopolitical division. Visitors are invited to consider their relationship to one another, to the natural world and to the passage of time.



Drawing from myth, folklore and fairytale traditions, the three artists respond to contemporary conditions of disconnection. Central to the exhibition is the influence of the *Kalevala*, the 19th-century epic of Finland and Karelia, particularly the myth of the Sampo: a magical 'vessel of abundance' that is ultimately destroyed with its pieces scattered into the sea. This narrative serves as a framework for exploring what happens when systems of order collapse, and how processes of fragmentation give rise to renewal. Within the Pavilion designed by Sverre Fehn, the works unfold as interconnected elements that explore instability, interdependence and transformation.

Klara Kristalova's *Lust for Life* centres on a monumental fallen tree that simultaneously suggests the form of a reclining or fallen female figure. Populated by hybrid creatures in ceramic, bronze and wood, the installation balances playfulness with an uncanny sense of vulnerability. The work blurs distinctions between human and non-human life, challenging fixed identities while emphasising the dignity of all living beings. Perched outside, *Bird Disguise*, an enigmatic owl-like figure, casts its gaze toward nearby pavilions, as if caught in transit, its point of origin and destination unclear, subtly dissolving notions of national belonging.

Benjamin Orlow's *Ritual City* fills the Pavilion's interior with a colossal sculptural form, improvised in situ from raw clay. Emerging from behind the trees, it takes the shape of a disembodied, partitioned figure, held in a precarious tension between cohesion and collapse. On the Pavilion's façade, a severed head is propped on steel piles, with wooden spikes shooting from its eyes. The sculpture echoes enduring mythological symbols of destruction and simultaneous rebirth. As the clay dries, cracks and disintegrates over the course of the exhibition, Orlow's practice emphasises process over permanence: the body not an ideal to be realised, but a site of continual negotiation.





Tori Wrånes' installation integrates sculptural, performative and sonic elements. In *Human Lace*, towering headless figures interlock and extend through the architecture, dissolving distinctions between interior and exterior space. Their forms suggest a metamorphosis into birds, echoing the moment of the Sampo's theft in the Kalevala. In *Erotic poetry by the architect, nature and me*, a kinetic figure repeatedly moves up and down a tree, introducing endurance and temporality as central themes. Wrånes also incorporates a sonic: A foghorn, vital in low visibility, signals every hour to warn off hazards and make you navigate safely. The Pavilion will be activated by a unique live performance during its opening ceremony on **Wednesday 6 May at 15:00**, and **Saturday 9 May at 13.00**.

Together, Kristalova, Orlow and Wrånes transform the Nordic Countries Pavilion into a living environment - one that is grown and inhabited as much as it is constructed. The exhibition proposes a space of coexistence shaped by continual change, asking how we might inhabit systems that are inherently unstable, and how transformation can become a shared condition rather than a point of rupture.

Anna Mustonen, Chief Curator at Kiasma, commented: "*With this exhibition, I wanted to create a space where the works are not simply placed within the Pavilion, but actively shape and transform it. The artists approach myth not as something distant or symbolic, but as a living method - one that allows us to think through collapse, fragmentation and renewal in relation to the present. At a time marked by division, the exhibition asks how we might inhabit a world that is fundamentally shifting, and how we can begin to imagine forms of connection that do not rely on fixed structures, but emerge through change itself.*"

Kiira Miesmaa, Director of Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma and commissioner of the Nordic Countries Pavilion 2026, commented: "*Seeing the Nordic Pavilion come together has been a powerful reminder of what cross-cultural collaboration can achieve. I have been struck by how a shared cultural heritage, mutual respect, and trust make it possible for distinct artistic voices and visual languages to coexist within a single, sculpturally charged space. This way of working not only brings the exhibition into being, but also reinforces the values we share and highlights the essential role of art in society.*"



Press contacts
International Media
Rel Hayman and Lucy Groom at Pelham Communications
rel@pelhamcommunications.com or lucy@pelhamcommunications.com
+44 7853 789717 / +44 20 8969 3959

Finnish Media
Kiira Koskela, Communications Officer
kiira.koskela@kiasma.fi

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Notes to editors

Credit line
Klara Kristalova, Benjamin Orlow and Tori Wrånes present *How Many Angels Can Dance on the Head of a Pin?* in the Nordic Countries Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, commissioned by Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma and co-commissioned by Moderna Museet (Sweden) and OCA – Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 9 May - 22 November 2026

Address: Nordic Countries Pavilion, Giardini della Biennale
Vernissage dates: Wednesday 6 – Friday 8 May 2026
Opening ceremony: Wednesday 6 May 2026, 15:00
Exhibition dates: Saturday 9 May – Sunday 22 November 2026

Image Captions:
1. Benjamin Orlow, *Ritual City*, 2026 in *How Many Angels Can Dance On The Head Of A Pin?,* Nordic Countries Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia. Photo: Kansallisgalleria | Finnish National Gallery / Pirje Mykkänen.

2. Klara Kristalova, Tori Wrånes and Benjamin Orlow in *How Many Angels Can Dance On The Head Of A Pin?,* Nordic Countries Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia. Photo: Kansallisgalleria | Finnish National Gallery / Pirje Mykkänen.

3. Klara Kristalova, *Lust for Life*, 2026 in *How Many Angels Can Dance On The Head Of A Pin?,* Nordic Countries Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia. Photo: Kansallisgalleria | Finnish National Gallery / Pirje Mykkänen.

4. Tori Wrånes, Human Lace, 2026 in *How Many Angels Can Dance On The Head Of A Pin?,* Nordic Countries Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia. Photo: Kansallisgalleria | Finnish National Gallery / Pirje Mykkänen.

5. Installation view, Klara Kristalova, Tori Wrånes and Benjamin Orlow in *How Many Angels Can Dance On The Head Of A Pin?,* Nordic Countries Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia. Photo: Kansallisgalleria | Finnish National Gallery / Pirje Mykkänen.

About the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma
The Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma is part of the Finnish National Gallery, Finland's largest art museum organisation, alongside the Ateneum Art Museum and the Sinebrychoff Art Museum. Kiasma presents exhibitions, performances, and events, and its mission also includes the collection and research of contemporary art. Works acquired by Kiasma become part of the Finnish National Gallery's collection and constitute an essential component of Finland's cultural heritage. The collection currently comprises nearly 9,000 works of contemporary art by almost 1,000 artists.

Public and educational programming lies at the core of Kiasma's activities, with the aim of making contemporary art accessible to all. The museum also houses the Kiasma Library, which specialises in contemporary art, as well as the Kiasma Theatre, a venue dedicated to contemporary live art.

About Klara Kristalova
Klara Kristalova (b. 1967, Prague, Czech Republic; lives and works in Norrtälje, Sweden) creates figurative ceramic sculptures that blend fairytale-like imagery with themes of isolation, transformation and psychological depth. Many of Kristalova's works incorporate both aspects of the human body and elements of nature, such as animals, insects, flowers, and trees. Infused with uncanny details and observations from her daily life and surroundings, her oeuvre is grounded in an exploration of transitional states essential to both human and ecological life.

Her work has been exhibited internationally, with solo shows at Perrotin, Paris (2024) and Lehmann Maupin, London (2023), and featured in Strange Clay at Hayward Gallery, London (2022). Other notable exhibitions include Skellefteå Konsthall (2025), Human After All at Princessehof Museum, Netherlands (2020), Norton Museum of Art, USA (2014), Bonniers Konsthall, Sweden (2012), and SFMOMA, USA (2011).

About Benjamin Orlow
Benjamin Orlow (b. 1984, Turku, Finland; lives and works in London, UK) works across sculpture, video and installation, to investigate the ways in which cultural narratives shape public and private spaces. His practice examines historical transitions, material culture and human interactions with built environments. His sculptures are often monumental, embodying solitude or the metamorphosis inherent in life's cyclical nature.

He has exhibited at Kunsthalle Seinäjoki (2025, Finland), Des Bains (2024, London, UK), Kohta Kunsthalle (2023, Helsinki, Finland), Horst-KANAL Centre Pompidou (2022, Brussels, Belgium) and Vasa Konsthall (2021, Vaasa, Finland). His video work has shown among others at the ICA London, Tetley in Leeds, Tramway in Glasgow, Fahrenheit in Los Angeles and Hordaland Kunstsenter in Norway. Orlow has been commissioned to create permanent public sculptures in Finland, Belgium and the United Kingdom. Aside from his own practice he curates the project space St. Chads in London.

About Tori Wrånes
Tori Wrånes (b. 1978, Kristiansand, Norway; lives and works in Oslo, Norway) fuses performance, sculpture, sound and space to construct dreamlike realities. Her immersive, often otherworldly environments challenge perception and redefine traditional performance spaces. The work is carried out in a courageous workout, where every aspect of life is looked at.

Her recent solo exhibitions include Moon Bag at Bergen Kunsthall (2025, Norway) Helsinki Art Museum HAM (2024, Finland), Accelerator (2022, Stockholm, Sweden), Shulamit Nazarian Gallery (2022, Los Angeles, US), Göteborgs Konstmuseum (2019, Gothenburg, Sweden) and Hot Pocket at Museum of Contemporary Art Oslo (2017, Norway). She has shown at Colombo Art Biennale, Sri Lanka CCA Lagos, Nigeria; and Sculpture Center, New York. Commissioned performances include 19th Biennale of Sydney, Performa 13 in New York, Lilith Performance Studio Malmø, Lagos Biennale in Nigeria, and Thailand Biennale. In 2019 she wrote a score for 40 accordion players for the show The Coming World at Garage Moscow. In the same year Wrånes developed an underwater performance in the Arctic called Sub Adventure.

About Anna Mustonen
Anna Mustonen is the Chief Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma in Helsinki. At Kiasma, she plays a leading role in shaping the museum's artistic programme, particularly in relation to Nordic and international contemporary practices. Trained at University College London, where she earned her M.A. in History of Art, she has worked at leading international institutions and private galleries in Europe, including Tate, Kumu Art Museum, Haunch of Venison, and Victoria Miro. She has curated exhibitions for Fotografiska, Helsinki Kunsthalle, and Kai Art Center, Tallinn, among others.

About Kiira Miesmaa
Kiira Miesmaa is a Finnish museum director and art historian specializing in contemporary art. She has served as Director of Kiasma, the Museum of Contemporary Art of the Finnish National Gallery, since 2024.

Prior to joining Kiasma, Miesmaa was Managing Director of Galerie Forsblom in Helsinki, where she worked for over a decade in senior leadership roles. During this time, she collaborated closely with Finnish and international artists, museums, and galleries, led international art-fair participation, and played a key role in developing the gallery's operations in both Helsinki and Stockholm. She previously served as Head of Exhibitions at Taidehalli (Helsinki Art Hall), overseeing exhibition programming, curatorial direction and production.

Miesmaa holds a Master's degree in Art History from the University of Turku and was previously a board member of HIAP – Helsinki International Artist Programme for seven years. She has edited and published several books on contemporary Finnish artists.

About Moderna Museet
Moderna Museet is one of Europe's leading museums for modern and contemporary art. We collect, preserve, share and exhibit modern art from the early 20th century and photography from 1840 and onwards. The Moderna Museet art collection comprises more than 130,000 works in various media.

The museum makes its collections available through exhibitions, educational activities, loans and long-term deposits, and by supporting research and the development of knowledge within the fields of art, architecture and design. Through practice, research and international collaboration, the museum works to increase knowledge and deepen understanding.

About OCA - Office for Contemporary Art Norway
The Office for Contemporary Art Norway is a foundation promoting contemporary art from Norway internationally. OCA expands international opportunities and contributes to global exchanges through various activities, including grants and residencies, research visits and network development, public programmes, and publishing. OCA is funded by the Ministry of Culture and Equality and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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